

Oregon

Tulip festival wins the weather game

By JAN JACKSON
For the Capital Press

WOODBURN, Ore. — With one eye on the weather report and the other on their fields, the Iverson family and their crew managed to open the month-long Wooden Shoe Tulip Fest a week early without a hitch.

Though the family also grows corn, grass seed, wheat, pumpkins, green beans and table and wine grapes, it is the popular 40 acres of tulips and daffodils that are open to the public that causes the most weather-related stress. This year, during the first four days the fields were open to the public, thousands of visitors came from 142 countries and

47 of the 50 states.

"This year we had to stay right on top of things to make it work," Barb Iverson, one of the principals of the family farm, said. "Fortunately, we saw the writing on the wall in February in time to open a week early. If we compared the season to the last five years we would say we opened a month early, but if we compared it over the last 25 we were only two weeks early."

This year they moved the festival opening day from March 27 to March 20 but left the closing date at May 3.

"February was so warm and dry the tulips started blooming too close to the ground to make them suitable for cut flowers so we

Wooden Shoe Tulip Fest
Hours: 9 a.m.-6 p.m.
Location: 33814 S. Meridian Road, Woodburn, Ore.

Admission: \$5 per person or \$20 maximum per car
Online: www.woodenshoe.com

had to get the water to them," she said. "We've only had to irrigate once in the 30-plus years we have been growing tulips but this year we had to do it three times. Now we are hoping the weather doesn't move into the 80s and shorten the season."

The Wooden Shoe Tulip Farm operation not only includes growing and selling bulbs, cut flowers and



Jan Jackson/For the Capital Press

Thousands of people visited the Wooden Shoe Tulip Fest last weekend. The annual festival near Woodburn, Ore., opened a week early because of the unseasonably warm weather.

potted tulips, but operates a gift shop and provides food, entertainment and

hands-on activities during the festival. Visitors can stroll

through the fields or take guided tours to learn how the crews cut and bundle flowers by hand to put in cold storage and how they remove all the remaining flower heads after the spring show so they won't drop on the ground and create disease in the fields. They also learn that the stems are allowed to die down naturally before the June harvest, and in October, the tulips are planted two rows at a time in raised rows with furrows to ensure they have proper drainage and to make harvesting easier.

"We were lucky with the weather this year, though," Iverson said. "We hit spring break and we have flowers for the early Easter."

U.S., Oregon mark milestone with sage

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press

Interior Secretary Sally Jewell and Oregon Gov. Kate Brown celebrated in Bend March 27 the state's efforts to conserve greater sage grouse habitat and possibly stave off an endangered species listing.

The event coincided with the Oregon Department of State Lands completing a conservation agreement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that covers 540,484 acres in Eastern Oregon. The document, called a Candidate Conservation

Agreement with Assurances, or CCAA, is going through a required public review period.

The CCAA is similar to agreements signed with other non-federal landowners throughout the sage grouse range in Eastern Oregon. The federal wildlife service, which implements the Endangered Species Act, previously signed CCAA accords with soil and water conservation districts representing ranchers and other private landowners in Harney, Baker, Crook, Deschutes, Grant, Lake, Malheur and southern Union counties.

In all, more than 4 million acres of sage grouse habitat is covered under conservation agreements.

The state land covered under the agreements includes only an estimated 638 of the state's 24,000 sage grouse and eight known leks, or breeding areas, but is significant because it makes management plans "seamless across the landscape," said Lanny Quackenbush, Eastern Oregon manager for the Department of State Lands.

Because private and government land containing sage

grouse habitat often are adjacent to each other, having a single management plan simplifies things, he said.

"One of our motives was to have it be very compatible and look pretty much like what private landowners have on their own land," Quackenbush said.

Almost all the state land covered under the agreement is leased for grazing, he said.

Under CCAA plans, landowners agree to manage their land in a way that benefits sage grouse. Landowners have described the measures as reasonable: they agree to do such

things as mark fences, put escape ramps in water troughs, keep grazing cattle out of leks and remove western juniper trees, which crowd out native sage and provide perches for sage grouse predators such as hawks and ravens. One Southeastern Oregon rancher, Tom Sharp, famously described the agreements as "What's good for the bird is good for the herd."

In return, landowners are protected from additional regulations for 30 years, even if sage grouse are eventually listed as endangered.

Farm zone bills raise concerns

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

SALEM — A pair of bills that would modify permissible activities in Oregon farm zones have raised concerns among agriculture and property rights groups, but compromises appear possible.

At issue is what nonfarming commercial activities will be allowed on land zoned for agriculture.

The current language of House Bill 3368, which would allow home businesses to take place in an "outdoor setting" in farm zones, is making the Oregon Farm Bureau nervous.

As currently written, the provision is "incredibly broad" and could be "a tremendous deviation from existing practices and extremely disruptive," said Mary Anne Nash, public policy counsel for the group, during a March 26 hearing of the House Committee on Rural Communities, Land Use and Water.

While the bureau is concerned that the bill would allow for a "myriad of commercial uses" that could interfere with farming, Nash said she hopes that amendments will narrow the scope of the legislation.

If the language better reflects the bill's intent — allowing farmers to hold weddings and similar events — then OFB would be willing to reconsider its position on the bill, she said.

The bureau's view was largely shared by the 1,000 Friends of Oregon conservation group and Oregon's Department of Land Conservation and Development, which said they also want to see modifications to the bill.

Legislation that would reduce allowable activities in farm zones, House Bill 2829, caused similar worries about overbreadth with the Oregonians in Action property rights group.

The bill defines the type of "private parks" that are permissible on farms, clarifying that they're intended only for "passive outdoor recreational opportunities," such as picnicking or hiking, and not active uses, such as paint ball competitions and tracks for motor vehicles.

Rep. Ken Helm, D-Beaverton, said he introduced the bill out of concern that such active "private parks" may change the nature of farmland in a way that's difficult to reverse.

Helm said he plans to propose an amendment to HB 2829 to limit the new definition to private parks on high-value farmland.

While areas with low-quality soils can also be disrupted by active recreation, that's a more nuanced situation that can be discussed later, he said.

Dave Hunnicutt, president of Oregonians in Action, said his group was prepared to oppose the bill as originally written but is amenable to a narrower version.

Some properties zoned for farming actually have very little agricultural value — such as an extremely rocky land — so it doesn't make sense to strictly limit recreation activities and events on them, he said.

Neonic ban would be disruptive, expert says

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

SALEM — A pesticide expert has warned Oregon lawmakers that legislation proposing to ban neonicotinoids could prompt a return to more toxic chemicals among farmers.

Neonicotinoid pesticides were blamed for pollinator die-offs in Oregon and critics say

the chemicals also have sublethal effects that are responsible for poor bee health.

Proposed legislation — House Bill 2589 and Senate Bill 882 — would prohibit the application of "nitro-group" neonicotinoids, including clothianidin, dinotefuran, imidacloprid and thiamethoxam, but the Oregon Department of Agriculture could make exemptions to the

ban in "unusual circumstances."

Paul Jepson, director of Oregon State University's Integrated Plant Protection Center, said a "blanket ban" could disrupt farmers' transition to more environmentally gentle methods of controlling pests.

Growers have relied on neonicotinoids as they've used fewer broad-spectrum organophosphate pesticides in recent years, but

may take up the older chemicals if the ban is approved, Jepson said during a series of recent hearings on multiple pesticide bills being considered by lawmakers.

While neonicotinoids can pose a problem for pollinators, such risks can be managed effectively, he said.

Farmers in Oregon have a history of responding to such hazards and state and federal regulators are being diligent in regulating neonicotinoids, he said.

Over time, farmers can transition from broad-spectrum pesticides to more pest-specific techniques, such as encouraging predatory insects, Jepson said. "It sounds slightly airy-fairy, but believe me, it isn't."

Rep. Paul Holvey, D-Eugene, said he proposed the neonicotinoid ban due to concerns that these chemicals are affecting not only pollinators but other insects and birds.

Though there are studies to support arguments for and against banning neonicotinoids, research generally indicates the pesticides are harmful, he said.

Holvey said he's worried about the consequences for non-target species because the chemicals are systemic.

"The whole plant becomes toxic," he said.

Holvey noted that in 2013, the European Commission — a governing body of the European Union — voted to restrict three neonicotinoids: clothianidin, imidacloprid and thiamethoxam.

"We need to take precautionary measures to ensure the sustainability of our environment," he said.

Ann Fairbrother, a retired consultant and former scientist for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, said that neonicotinoids were found to be poisonous to bees at doses to which they won't realistically be exposed in the field.

"These studies tell us what is possible but not what is probable," Fairbrother said.

Aside from the neonicotinoid ban, Holvey has sponsored other pesticide legislation that's being reviewed by the committee: House Bill 3123, which would ban aerial applications except during emergencies declared by state regulators, and House Bill 3482, which would require pesticide applications to be reported to the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality.

During the hearing, Rep. Brian Clem, D-Salem, spoke about several bills he has introduced:

- HB 3428 would create new certification requirements for aerial pesticide applicators.
 - HB 3434 would appropriate money — likely about \$2 million — for three new pesticide investigators and a claims processor at ODA.
 - HB 3429 would establish standard operating procedures for state agencies to handle pesticide complaints.
 - HB 3430 would create a telephone hotline for people concerned about pesticide misuse.
- Representatives of agricultural groups who testified during recent hearings generally opposed Holvey's bills while favoring the legislation introduced by Clem.

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